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ABSTRACT

The program, methodology, techniques, and materials used at the Adult Continuing Education Center located at Danville (Illinois) Junior College are described. The program is divided into five levels from beginning or introductory through GED preparation. A non-graded, individualization approach is used with support for such an approach found in the definition and characteristics of the adult student. Several techniques employing a variety of specific materials at each level are described as well as a listing of the reading program objectives. (TO)

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Reading Instruction for Basic Adult Literacy

Pre-convention Institute V, Wednesday, April 30, 9:00-11:30 A.M.

It is rather unusual to find a junior college that has an Adult Continuing Education Center with a basic education and vocational program, a high school equivalency program, and the customary short-term vocational and avocational adult programs; yet, this is the kind of center to be found at Danville Junior College in Danville, Illinois. This Center should not be so unusual, for the junior college seems the proper place for adults to attend school. The College surroundings provide the adult with a measure of prestige which is lacking when he must return to a common school setting to resume his education.

The Center is funded by the Illinois Department of Public Aid through Section 10:22-20 of the Illinois School Code, Title III of the Adult Education Act of 1966, and by tuition fees. Students in the

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adult program include people who are Public Aid recepients and those who are not.

Informal Testing Used to Place Students in Classes

In the fall prospective students are interviewed by the counselors before school begins. From conversations, the types of answers given to questions, the amount of assistance needed to fill out the application forms, and the use of the Harris Graded Word List and the Informal Textbook Test contained in the Curriculum Guide to Adult Basic Education, Intermediate Level, a publication of the U.S. Office of Education, the counselors determine the levels where they feel the students should begin. The students are informed that their classes may be only temporary until the teachers decide whether they have been placed at the correct levels or not. After a week has passed, the teachers and counselors meet to discuss any schedule changes which need to be made. The decisions rest on the students' needs in mathematics and reading; and if the differences are great in these two areas, math ability takes priority. It is felt that group instruction is more essential in math, and that wide ranges of individual differences can be handled more easily in the reading classes.

Five fifty-minute classes are held daily, Monday through Friday, and additional classes are held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. At the introductory level, which is comparable to first through third grades, classes are taught in self-contained classrooms while the intermediate and high school equivalency level classes are taught in departmental situations. At the intermediate level, day students

are scheduled for reading on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; and the high school equivalency students meet on Tuesday and Thursday for reading.

Students may enroll in classes at any time during the year. The counselors take those students who enroll after the first week of school on a tour of the Center, and the students are introduced to the teachers they will have. In this way an attempt is made to make new pupils feel relaxed and welcome.

Formal Testing

In order to have a record of the overall success of the program and for an initial appraisal of the students' strengths and weaknesses, tests are given to students at the intermediate and higher levels during the first week of entry. The Nelson-Reading Test, grades three through nine, and the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, grade nine through adult, (Houghton-Mifflin) are used in reading classes. The particular test given is determined by the scores of the informal tests given previously by the counselors. Formal testing is not recommended for adults on the initial contact with them, because enrolling in school is sometimes a frightening experience for them. To make the new student feel self-conscious or apprehensive by being greeted with a battery of tests might cause him to not return to school, for he may remember school as being a long series of failures on tests.

Testing situations are always handled with care. The staff does everything possible to make the student feel comfortable and at ease. Teachers are careful to point out to the students that they no longer have to consider tests as threats since they will not pass or fail on

the basis of their test scores. They are told that the tests are used to help decide which materials will be best for them to use. Directions are given and are repeated patiently as often as necessary so that the students are certain of what they are to do. While it is impossible to relieve all students of anxiety, testing usually does not seem to be a threat to them.

Non-graded Structure of Program

A decision may be made at any of the monthly staff meetings to move a student from one level to another although most of these changes are made following the G.E.D. (high school equivalency) exams which are given three times each year. At these times students who are capable enter the special G.E.D. classes which are held prior to each of the examination dates.

Whenever it is possible, students from the introductory level go to one of the higher level classes for those subjects in which they have the ability to do more difficult work; yet, they still remain in the security of the self-contained classroom for those subjects in which they still need much individual attention.

Individualized Instruction

From the description of the program, it must be obvious that the key for teaching adults at the Center is individualized instruction, which is both an effective and a necessary method in adult education. With such wide ranges in age, social and educational experience, and ability, a plan designed to fit the individual brings the most satisfying results. Individualized instruction also permits enrollment of students at any

time during the year. It works well in combating instructional problems caused by the irregular attendance resulting from adult responsibilities. Teaching a lesson to an entire class is not often possible because it is seldom that all students in a class are present at one time. Certain basic lessons may be reserved for group instruction at times when most of the class is present. Since the teacher cannot keep repeating a lesson for those who were absent when the lesson was presented, individualized instruction minimizes the absentee problem. Each member of the class can work on a different lesson, and each student can progress at his own rate. Thus, the mother who has been absent six weeks because one by one her children came down with the chicken pox, can resume her studies without feeling that she is behind the class. The teacher simply consults the records of the student's progress, and she resumes her studies.

Special Problems in Teaching Adults

Poor attendance is not the only problem instructors face in teaching adults. Most of the instructors at the Center have attended institutes in adult education, and in-service workshops are held at the Center. Though most of the instructors hold master's degrees, these are not in adult education for the field is so new there have been few opportunities to even take courses in adult education. The Center has a professional library and the publications, "Swap Shop" and "Techniques," of the National Association for Public School Adult Education and the magazines, Adult Leadership and Adult Education, published by the Adult Education Association provide much useful information on teaching adults. Until

the special problems connected with teaching adults are understood, teachers cannot expect to teach reading or any other subject and have good results.

The first problem the teacher encounters with the adult student has already been mentioned; that is, the fears that some adults may have about attending school. It may have taken much courage for them even to enter the building the first day. With patience and understanding these fears can be lessened. The teacher who admits to the students that he doesn't know the answers to every question, but can help the students find the answers, makes the student feel more confident. There should be an informal atmosphere in the classroom. Many times discussions can be held as to why students didn't finish school when they were younger. When the people find that others have reasons similar to theirs, and that the teacher accepts and understands these reasons, they are not so self-conscious about the fact that they do not have an education. Such seemingly ridiculous reasons--at least from a teacher's point-of-view--as being called a "sissy" or accused of "putting-on-airs; by members of their peer group have caused good students to do poor work and finally drop out of school.

Teachers must show genuine interest in the students and their problems, and at the Center a card file with students' addresses is kept so that the teachers can call or write the student who has been absent several days to let him know he is missed. This is just one way the teachers can show interest in the individual.

The teacher must keep in mind both the basic principles of learning, and the special problems connected with teaching adults. The adult learner must see quick results in his learning. The materials must be meaningful, and each lesson should have a goal that the student can obtain. He must be provided plenty of practice materials, and a variety of materials and techniques must be used in order that each student can have experiences which appeal to him. Adults are motivated to learn or they wouldn't be in school, but the teacher must praise their efforts so that they remain motivated. They must be encouraged to contribute to the class for although they may not be able to read or write, they have a background of knowledge gained from their experiences. They need many chances to feel successful in their classroom environment. The following is a list of the special problems of adult learners which are not similar to problems of the child learner:

- Adults are tired after working or caring for a family.
- Adults can learn as well as young children, but the learning may take longer.
- Adults are eager to learn and are sometimes impatient when they do not seem to progress as rapidly as they wish.
- Adults must see some relationship of the lessons to their needs in raising a family and in their vocations.
- Adults have more sight and hearing difficulties than children.
- Adults have little time for homework.

These special problems must be kept in mind when teaching and when choosing materials to be used.

Choosing Materials

There should be as much variety in materials and equipment as the budget will stand in adult education. In selecting or preparing materials, the following points should be considered:

1. Materials should be appropriate for the kinds of students to be taught. Are they farmers, migrant workers, or factory workers?
2. Lessons must provide practice for varying abilities.
3. Materials and activities should be about familiar and interesting subjects.
4. Materials, even at the beginning levels, should have vocabularies which are in an adult style.
5. Beginning materials should have short sentences, and large type and double spacing should be used.
6. Readability levels of materials should be checked.
7. Each lesson should teach one or two concepts which the student can master so that he can feel successful.
8. Lessons should be in sequential and logical order.
9. Lessons should be presented so that the students can go ahead by themselves much of the time.
10. Some materials should pertain to life situations, such as homemaking, vocational opportunities, citizenship rights and duties, and recreational reading.

These underlying principles guide the instructors in the Center as they

work with the students, and as they choose materials to use with each student.

Objectives for Teaching Reading

The first year the Center opened the following list of objectives was devised by the reading teachers:

1. Teach reading as a developmental process.
2. Determine and provide reading readiness experiences.
3. Develop verbal concepts and word recognition.
4. Develop the ability to communicate ideas and information.
5. Develop comprehension of ideas that words represent.
6. Develop the ability to comprehend and read for information.
7. Develop critical thinking and constructive discussion.
8. Encourage application of reading abilities in solving daily problems.
9. Develop study skills and habits.
10. Instill a desire for worth-while recreational reading.

Teaching on the Introductory Level

As is true at all the levels, a variety of approaches is used in finding the best way to teach each student at the introductory level. The Gray Oral Reading Paragraphs (Bobbs-Merrill) are used to determine the functional level of each student. They are taught the alphabet, if they do not already know it. Much time is spent in discussions before reading instruction is begun because many of the students do not talk in complete sentences when they start to school. It is necessary for them to build a verbal background. Articles in the newspaper,

News for You, Edition A (Laubach Literacy, Inc.); subjects which relate to their daily lives; historical events; and information about the workings of government are topics for these conversations which are of interest to adults.

Many times discussions about the different meanings of the same word result in amusing incidents. One day a class was using the word "change" in sentences. Such examples as "change a tire, change clothes, and making change" had been used when one lady came up with "change the baby." Another lady who happened to be a foreign student got very excited and exclaimed, "Oh, no! You couldn't do that!"

Teachers find that adults have to overcome some of the same language difficulties that children have, such as adding an "s" to words where none is needed and dropping the "s" where there should be one. However, adults do seem to acquire a larger sight vocabulary more quickly than children do because adults have had a larger experience with the spoken word; therefore, reading instruction is begun with the sight approach.

Most of the time experience charts are not used with the entire group because there are seldom two students at the same level; thus, the teacher works with the individual on experience stories which the student writes and then reads with the teacher's help. Writing the words reinforces the learning. Replicas of signs which the students see in everyday surroundings are displayed so that the students may learn to read them. The little techniques that are used to teach reading to children, such as matching words, pointing out similarities and differences,

and rhyming may be used with adults. The challenge for the teacher is do these things on an adult level. The goal is for the students to find that reading is pleasurable, and the instructor must find the best method for teaching the students to read and to enjoy reading.

Some of the materials used can be found in any primary grade classroom. The Dolch Basic Sight Word cards (Garrard Press) and Reading Laboratory Ic (Science Research Associates) are used. Flashcards, either teacher-made or those accompanying the texts, are used for practice also. The Garrard Press Discovery Books series and the Harr Wagner biographies and Deep Sea Adventure series are on the bookshelves. But there are many materials which were prepared especially for adults. One series which provides continuity in a sight picture approach is the Steck Vaughn texts, Working with Words, Working with Word Patterns, and Building Word Power. From Words to Stories and Operation Alphabet (Noble and Noble) are also good to use with the sight method. Steck-Vaughn; Noble and Noble; and the Allied Education Council, publisher of the Mott Basic Language Skills Program, are pioneers in the publication of adult materials.

The Language Master has been found to be a valuable tool in teaching word recognition, improvement of vocabularies, pronunciation of words, and improvement of speech. It is particulary useful in helping foreign students learn English. This machine uses cards similar to data processing cards. On some cards there is a picture and the word naming the object. On other cards are printed sentences or phrases,

and some cards are blank for teacher-made material. At the bottom of the card is s strip of recording tape on which an instructor pronounces the words. The student records his own pronunciation of the words, and then he can listen to both the instructor and himself and compare the pronunciations.

When students have acquired a good sight reading vocabulary, phonics instruction may be introduced. However, if the instructor finds a student who has difficulty with this approach, then it is not pushed. The M.W. Sullivan materials are used for supplementary work and phonic drills, and as the students progress the Mott materials, which are based on phonics, are sometimes used. When the student can read independently, S.R.A. materials are started. Each student is allowed to work with the materials which seem best suited to his needs and abilities. Actually on all levels, every lesson is a reading lesson whether it is in math, English, history, or science. The class may read an easy story about Columbus which may lead the better reader to some in-depth reading in the encyclopedia or in other sources.

Many ways are used to check the progress of the students. In addition to teacher evaluations, man y of the texts have progress tests. The Dolch Basic Sight Word Test is used, and the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE, Harcourt, Brace & World), which is one of the few tests designed especially for adults, is used ocasionally.

Teaching on the Intermediate Level and Above

At the intermediate and higher levels, the students are divided into

five groups. Level I is comparable to grade four; Level II, grades five and six; Level III, grades seven and eight; Level IV, grade nine and up; and the G.E.D. level. At the G.E.D. level, the students concentrate on literature appreciation. Since these students are not considered a part of the basic literacy program, their work will not be mentioned again. Students in the other four levels spend approximately nine weeks in the reading laboratory and nine weeks in a classroom situation in keeping with a suggestion found in a study by Mayhew and Weaver (Journal of Developmental Reading: 3:75-83. Winter, 1960) which dealt with four different methods of teaching reading. It was noted that by concentrating on a textbook approach for several weeks, and then using mechanical devices for several weeks, students were easier to motivate although they did not make any greater gains than the other two groups which also showed improvement. Since motivating the adult student is important, this scheduling has been used. The longer periods of time in either the lab or the classroom also limits the amount of confusion for students as to which room they are supposed to be in for reading class.

At Levels I and II, the Mott materials provide an integration of reading, spelling, and English skills. Each skill reinforces the other, much written practice is provided, and the stories can be used to stimulate discussions about problems pertaining to everyday lide. A review of phonic and structural elements and dictionary practices are included. For schools with low budgets, or with inexperienced teachers, these materials offer a good start in adult education. Edition B of News for You is

also available for these students. This edition seems better fitted to the students than Edition A does to the introductory level. The teachers at that level feel that an even simpler edition is needed for beginning students.

SRA Laboratories IIb and IIIa are used with the students at Levels I and II. Although not written for adults, the tone of the language used--even on the lower levels--is suitable, and the stories are interesting to adults. After reading the stories which would be helpful to the students in their science or history classes, the students may choose the stories they wish to read. The instructor checks every fifth lesson with the student. If the scores on this lesson and the preceding lessons are good, the student is allowed to move up a level. While checking these lessons periodically, the teacher has a chance to have the student read orally if the teacher wishes, and any problems the student seems to have can be discussed. This periodic checking discourages cheating, for no matter how often the teacher tries to convince students that they won't be considered "dumb" for making mistakes, there are always those students who feel that they must have correct answers even if they have to cheat to get them. It is very difficult to convince some students that they can learn form correcting their mistakes.

Many educators fear using programmed materials because they feel that students will cheat. However, studies have shown that a student who follows the procedures with programmed materials will learn from the experience of working with the materials even if he copies the answers

in the final step. Most adults who cheat when they first begin attending classes do so because they are unsure of their ability, but they soon learn to play the game according to the rules when they find they are not threatened by failing grades since no grades are given. Those who continue to cheat discover that when it comes time for any summary tests, they cannot do the work they are supposed to know how to do.

It is important that students understand the reasons for the teacher conducting this "Do-it-yourself" kind of school. They must be convinced that they are capable of carrying on their work alone, and that in the long run this teaches them to be independent. They also can understand the attendance problem and can see it is to their advantage not to have to wait for the rest of the class in order to advance in their studies. They need to recognize the teacher is there more to help them than to tell them what to do, and they must not feel self-conscious about having to ask for help. The teacher can occasionally make statements, such as "I'm here to help you," and "Don't be afraid to ask me for help." It is also a good idea to walk around the room stopping by each student and asking, "Do you need any help?"

The tachistoscope and the Language Master can be used at these levels also. The Language Master is used in the same ways that it has proved useful at the introductory level. The tachistoscope is used to increase "seeing" akills, that is for rapid recognition and interpretation of symbols; to teach and extend sight vocabularies, and to teach structural

and phonic analysis. The teacher must watch for signs of anxiety which may indicate the adults are being pushed too hard, and the length of drill time must be judged accordingly.

At Levels III and IV, the basic materials used are SRA laboratories IIIa and IVa and the Educational Reader's Digest, in addition to the materials available in the reading laboratory. Mott materials are used as supplementary materials at this level, and a library of approximately three hundred paperback books is on hand in the reading laboratory and in the classroom. Students in Levels I and II may use these library books also. EDL Reading 300 Library B (Educational Developmental Laboratories) and Steck-Vaughn soft-cover adult library books make up the bulk of the materials in this library.

The reading laboratory is equipped with fifteen carrels, each wired with individual headphones for listening to any of three taped lessons which may be played simultaneously. Each carrel also contains a Controlled Reader, Jr. (EDL) for reading rate training. In addition five Skimmers (EDL) for skimming and scanning practice are in the laboratory. These are used when the student is reading at about ninth grade level at the rate of 450 words per minute.

Before the students begin to work with the Controlled Readers, they are given the SRA Reading for Understanding placement test. Most students can get the first fifty answers correct; therefore, an adequate judgement of starting levels can be found by starting with item fifty-one of the test. These materials offer practice in reading paragraphs for comprehension

rather than practice with basic reading skills, such as word attack skills or reading to find the answers to questions. Since it is not necessary to complete this work in one session, the materials are useful in the reading laboratory. It is difficult for an instructor to start a class on the Controlled Reader because individual instruction is needed to be certain that the students know how to use the machines. The Reading for Understanding materials can be used by the students until the instructor can teach each of them to use the Controlled Reader. After everyone has learned to use the Controlled Readers, the students do a Controlled Reader lesson first; and then they spend the remainder of the lab session using Reading for Understanding.

To determine the starting level of each student on the Controlled Reader materials, the SRA reading laboratory scores and the Reading for Understanding scores are used. The Word Clues tests (EDL) work well also for placement in rate training materials. The levels range from fourth to fourteenth grade. Each student uses a workbook containing stories which are previewed along with a study of new words introduced in the story. Then a filmstrip with the complete story on it is read. The student then answers ten comprehension questions about the story. A record is kept of speeds and comprehension scores on each story. Except for the answer sheets, the materials are used non-consummably.

Most students start reading at a speed of 180 words per minute on the Controlled Readers. It seems that 120 words per minute is too slow for most of the students, and they get restless and do not concentrate as

well on the stories. A student keeps increasing his speed as long as his comprehension scores are above 80%. Below this level the rate is kept the same. Occasionally when a student continues to do poorly at a slow speed, the rate is increased to see if the first speed was too slow. Most of the time, however, continuing low comprehension scores indicate the material is too difficult for the student.

After every five lessons, Reading Efficiency Checks (EDL) are given. These tests are on the same levels as the filmstrip stories, and the student is timed while reading from a regular workbook. These materials are used to try to help the student transfer increases in rate to a normal reading situation. Most adults are sure that they cannot read any faster than they do. So often the statement is heard, "I can't understand anything unless I read it over two or three times." One student, who for many weeks was not able to finish an SRA card or a Controlled Reader lesson in one class period, finally was able to do both. She remarked that she had discovered that she really could read faster than she thought she could.

It takes much encouragement from the teacher to convince the students that they don't actually need to "see" every word to understand most of what they read. When students first begin using the Controlled Readers, they are told not to worry about getting several answers wrong because they have to have time to get adjusted to using the machines. They also are reminded that they have proved that they can read and find answers to questions in their other reading, and that the idea of this new kind of lesson is for them to learn to read faster. Most students soon adjust

to this novel way of reading and come to enjoy being in the lab. Because reading and listening are closely related, the Listen and Read and Listen and Write tapes are used to present new lessons and for practice on skills.

The Center has many other kinds of equipment which the teachers use in their classrooms. Each desk has an overhead projector which proves invaluable in presenting new lessons and reviewing old lessons. Many teacher-made transparencies prove helpful in teaching such things as letter sounds, syllabication, and using diacritical marks. The opaque projector is used to present the students' stories to the class for group reading. Test papers may be placed on the machine, and the teacher can point out important ideas to the class. The tape recorders are used by the students to practice and to listen to their oral reading and to improve their speech patterns.

At the Adult Continuing Education Center in Mattoon, Illinois, a video tape machine is available; and many introductory lessons are taped so that the teacher does not have to repeat instructions to the continuing stream of new students entering the program. Lessons also can be taped to enable students to make up lessons they missed during absences.

Teachers in the Danville Center have devised many kinds of answer sheets to minimize the cost of materials. For the lessons which require expensive workbooks, acetate sheets and grease marking pencils are used sometimes so that the workbooks need not be consumed.

In the final analysis, no matter what kinds of materials are used, adult students will not learn if their needs are not met. The teacher of

adults must treat them as the mature persons they are. He must accept their morals, overlook their faults, not talk down to them, and treat them as equals. Adult students are not members of the captive audience found in the common school. Unless they feel accepted, they may become dropouts for perhaps the last time.

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